

**Political History Collection
Interview H.0210.03 : Tape 3**

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Location of Interview: Kalimpong, India
Date of Interview: 1984
Language of Interview: Tibetan
Interviewed by: Gelek Rimpoche
Name: Rinzin Wangpo
Gender: Male
Age: 64
Date of Birth: 1920

Abstract

Rinzin Wangpo was Tibetan monk who became a Hinayana monk and spent time teaching in England and Sri Lanka. He also worked for his uncle Tharchi Babu on his famous Tibetan newspaper produced in Kalimpong. In this interview, Rigzin Wangpo discusses the Trade Mission and tells how the Nepalese interpreter was asked by Tharchin Babu about their activities. Additionally, he talks about going to London to teach Tibetan and his book on Tibetan Phonetics. He then discusses his return to India, his work at Tharchin Babu's newspaper, and also the two Japanese spies sent by the British to Jyekundo. Finally, he discusses the associations in Kalimpong such as the Panchyat Kyidu and the Yitön Kyidu, and how he and Dando Rimpoche tried to set up a school and a library that held the Tibetan scriptures and how others reacted to their request.

Tape 3

A: Then there was a Trade Delegation that consisted of Shakabpa, Surkhang, Changkhyim and Panda. They had a Nepalese interpreter. When Tharchin Babu asked the Nepalese about their activities while attending the trade missions meetings - he replied that when they reached New York all that these delegates did was to visit all the big and expensive hotels, prostitutes and other places of pleasure. He did not see them doing anything about trade and the about what kind of the Tibetan products should be exported etc. He said they visited all the top hotels and cinema theaters and there was no talk about trade. They inquired about good watches for personal usage and no inquiries and contacts concerning trade were made. He wondered how they could serve the government! He said that when they arrived in England, they did the same thing. Then they came to London, but I couldn't visit them.

Q: Did they report about the Tibetan Trade Mission in the London newspaper?

A: Yes, they did.

Q: What happened after 1947?

A: Then I went to England.

Q: Before that, in Lhasa you were close to Drumpa, Horkhang and also Changöpa [Tib. bya dngos pa] who also went to England, right? Why couldn't they get work done?

A: At that time, Changöpa also didn't have any work.

Q: What happened?

A: I don't know much about this.

Q: What did he say?

A: At that time, the son of Chnagöpa was learning Tibetan grammar from Tshatrul Rimpoche.

Q: This is the present Changöpa Dorje Ngodrub [Tib. rdo rje dngos grub]. Did he know English?

A: Yes.

Q: And his wife also knew English; she was from the Trendong [Tib. bkras mthong] family. Why didn't they have work?

A: When I was there, the son was yet to become the lay official. I would go to him to discuss and help him on the Tibetan grammar. At that time, I knew a little English and I had many English magazines like National Geographic and he would like them.

Q: Why did you go to England?

A: At that time, they needed a teacher there. Tharchin Babu told me that it would be very good if I went for this job since I could learn lot of things. So I went with Hopkinson who was the last Political officer of Sikkim.

Q: What kind of passport did you carry?

A: My passport was issued from the Kashag and the foreign office in Lhasa.

Q: Where did you have that?

A: I gave it to Tharchin Babula and he said that he had to show it to Yabshi and later I didn't get that back. I went by sea to Ceylon and everywhere and I had all of their stamps in the passport and we got a stamp at the dock for permitting us to go to Ceylon for tour and then we went to Eden and then crossed the Suez canal and reached Port Said in Egypt which was under the British and we also went for a tour in Port Said. At that time, India had already gained the independence, but the British power was still there.

Q: Hopkinson might be in staying in first class in the ship, where were you?

A: I was also in the first class where each person had a room and a kind of servant called a cabin boss. After that, we crossed the Atlantic Ocean and reached London Taberi Town. When I reached there, Dr. Sprick came to receive me. When I met him he said, "Welcome, teacher. Auspicious greetings for you" [Tib. rgan lags phyag phebs gnam byung bkra shis bde legs]. It made me very happy to hear Tibetan. Beside him there was no one else who could speak Tibetan. I stayed at Connaught Hall situated near the London University. This was a hostel for the school teachers and the foreign students.

Q: How many rooms did you have then?

A: I had one room and the food was served in the dinning room and there were about 200 people there eating the same food. I taught spoken Tibetan Language at the school of Oriental studies. Dr. Sprick was my only student. He came to Gyantse for a short visit around 1950.

Q: How long did you stay at London?

A: I stayed for almost one year and six months.

Q: During that period there were there any incidents?

A: Yes. At that time, there were some officers who had worked as the Sikkim Political Officer and as representatives in Tibet that we called Biri Minister [Tib. sbi ri blon chen], for example, like Major Sheriff, Sir Basel Gould and few others like a colonel who had worked in Gyantse as the head of the Trade Mission [Tib. tshong spyi] in Tibet. They invited me for lunches. They told me that at present Tibet is in a very precarious position [Tib. yen kha chen po] - sooner or later it would fall under Chinese domination. This was the time when Mao started to cause trouble saying that Tibet is under China. An Indian representative had also declared that Tibet is part of China.

Q: There was not anything to do in London?

A: In London I received a letter from the Tibetan foreign office stating "You are in London as a teacher on a personal basis. You have not been sent by the Tibetan Government. Hence you shall under no circumstances talk anything concerning the government policy." This letter had been redirected from my house and they have added that they had to get Dragtön [Tib. brag thon] sign a pledge to the government as the guarantor that I would not say anything recklessly. Otherwise, the consequences would not be good. When they asked about Tibet, I should say, "I don't know much about Tibet and I am not working on political affairs. I am just studying like a student."

Q: What is the reason for instructing you in such a manner? Do you think it is due to the Chinese?

A: The Chinese were yet to come to Tibet.

Q: At that time, did you have photo on your passport?

Q: Yes, it was sealed with the black seal of the Kashag and the seal of the Foreign Office.

Q: After staying for one and a half years in London where did you go?

A: Then I returned to Kalimpong and worked for Tharchin Babu's newspaper.

Q: Why did you come back?

A: I wanted to come back because there were very few Tibetans and Buddhists.

Q: At that time, did they publish a book when you were there?

A: The university printed the work we did there called Tibetan Phonetics. In it, it was written about the 8 sources of sound like throat, lips, teeth, tongue and nose, etc. From the other sources there were drawings and all of those stuffs, but we didn't have much to say. So I made a chart with drawings which shows and explained the differences of the high and low tones. At that time, a journalist from the evening news of London and the Daily Mirror came to me and asked me my impressions and experiences about England. So I told them that your knowledge about the materials things like machines and gadgets are far ahead of us. However, this does not impress me. The Tibetan technology is within our heart. You cannot see it. I told them that our technology is given to us by the Lord Buddha. In their newspapers they published my speech with the caption, "I am so sorry for you." They were referring to my statement when I said, "Despite your great advance in technology you don't know the real teachings of the Lord Buddha and hence you are like a blacksmith who makes sword which will cut your own neck. Likewise all the technology and arms you produce will finally fall on your own heads. Therefore, I feel sorry for you." The other matters contained a physical description about me. They had written that I was about 5 ft 3 inches tall with slight built and had almond shaped eyes. They had also written that I had brought along with me a boxful of prayer books with which to pray for the sake of England not to have war. In Tibet, there are 3-4 cars. Another item stated that I found their police were very good and I said if anybody likes to go to Tibet I may take you. Since the paper had written like that a policeman wrote to me saying, "I am working as a policeman right now but I am about to leave the post. I am not very old and if you take me with you, I consent to become a policeman in Tibet."

Q: Then when you returned and worked for Tharchin Babu's newspaper what were the major news items?

A: At that time, the news consisted mainly about spies in Tibet who were running a restaurant. All this was published in Tharchin Babu's paper. At that time, Dawa Sangbo [Tib. zla ba bzang po] became an English spy and went up to Jyekundo. Tharchin Babu had sent him to our house in Lhasa. In our house there was portrait of the Meiji, the Japanese Emperor, on the wall. It was given to me by Tsatrül Rimpoche. When Dawa Sangbo saw this portrait he made a slight bow and asked me from where I had got this portrait. I told him that it was given to me by Tsatru Rimpoche [Tib. tsha sprul rin po che]. I think he suspected that I might also be a Japanese. Later he told me that he was in Mongolia for a long duration as a student. He did not tell me anything further. He told me that had a friend and asked me to come along with him to visit his friend. This friend was a tall thin man attired in a monk's robe and could speak a little Tibetan. His Tibetan name was Lobsang. Dawa Sangbo told me that they had come from Tharchin Babu of Kalimpong. They told me that they were going to Jyekundo to get one of their relatives who was there. They went together.

At that time, an abbot of Sera Je and many monks had run away. The government had issued orders to arrest them throughout the country. They were presumed to be monks of Sera Je and they were arrested - their feet and hands were tied and they were whipped. They pleaded that they were not monks of Sera Je but Mongolians who are on their way to Jyekundo to meet their relative. They said if you don't believe us here is a letter to Sawang Yuthok written by Tharchin Babu. After seeing the letter they were released. Later they had made maps up to Jyekundo with other information like how many Chinese families were at the border, the various Chinese offices like the post offices and the banks and other installations, what the Tibetans' opinions about the Chinese were like and also Tibetan offices so on. At that time, Yuthok was the Doji.

Then Dawa Sangbo and Lobsang returned to Kalimpong in the 9th month. I had reached Kalimpong 2 months earlier. These two Japanese came back and stayed with Tharchin Babu and they started drawing the maps. I started suspecting them to be spies only after I saw them drawing the maps. Lobsang was also a Japanese. They were real experts at drawing maps. Lobsang was also Japanese and a Railway Station Master and Dawa Sangbo had been a soldier. He had been sent by the intelligence department from Korea to Xinjiang. In Xinjiang they had to bury their wireless and escaped to Tibet. He knew how to recite the prayer of Drolma (Tara). He would recite this prayer and people would give him food and shelter. Later he told me that people were happy to hear him reciting the prayer to Drolma, otherwise he would not have gotten anything to eat. He said that this prayer really came in handy. In Kalimpong they drew the maps and wrote down all the other details. At that time, the British Intelligence headquarters was situated in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Tharchin Babu wrote to the headquarters in Ceylon and the head of the office came to Kalimpong and met with Dawa Sangbo and gave him a cash reward. With this as a capital Dawa Sangbo did a little trading. He was quite a capable person. He could speak a little bit of English and therefore in Lhasa he was quite a hit. People would invite him for luncheons and parties. One fine day, Dawa Sangbo plunged in the river and started swimming. This gave away his cover. Everyone realized that he was not a Mongolian and later people came to know that he was a Japanese. Later when the government expelled all the spies of the Guomindang, these two were also kicked out.

When Dawa Sangbo first came to Tharchin Babu, he at once realized that he was a Japanese. At that time, the II World War was just over and he had come to spy. Tharchin Babu told him that you are not a Mongolian so tell me the truth. He told the truth. He admitted that he was Japanese and also told him the purpose of his visit. After that he said that now I have told you everything and I am at your mercy. Tharchin told him not to worry and asked him to say that he was a Mongol and so he lived with Tharchin. Meanwhile Tharchin wrote to the British Intelligence Office saying that he had such a man with him, what should be done with him? The answer came with the instruction to keep him with him and they shall make use of him. The head of the intelligence office came up and got Dawa Sangbo enrolled in the Homes School for 6 months to learn English. The expenses would be paid by them. So for 6 months he learned English but pretended otherwise. After that he was sent to Tibet. He was successful, and on his return he was rewarded. Dawa Sangbo's friend Lobsang is still in Japan. He has become blind. I don't know whether he has written a book or not but Dawa Sangbo has written a book on Tibet in Japanese. In it he has mentioned all about his work and experience in Kalimpong and Tibet. He had sent one copy to Tharchin Babu.

Q: Then what other incident took place?

A: Then there was lot of problem concerning the presence of spies in Tibet.

Q: Beside that what other things happened? I heard that a Panchyat Association was formed in Kalimpong. Then there was the Jenkhentsisum.

A: The Panchyat Association was formed by Tharchin Babu and others. Kujar was the main leader of the association. Abo Raga was also involved in it. After Panchyat Kyiduk many other smaller associations were also formed. But the Panchyat Kyiduk was the biggest group. After a while another association known as Yitön Kyiduk was formed whose main leader was Lhawang of Darjeeling - financed by Tharchin Babu.

Q: What is the reason for forming this Yitön Kyiduk?

A: The main objective for forming this association was that they saw a need for a big association under which all the Tibetans should join together. Panchyat Kyiduk and others also came under this association like the Tailor's Association, etc. Lhawang was the president of this association. They would hold the meetings at the Tibet Hotel. In the office they had two flags - a Tibetan and a religious flag. The Yitön Kyidug saw the need to open a Tibetan School so that the Tibetan language and culture will stay alive. The present school where Dando Rimpoche is teaching, was established in 1955. In this school not only the Tibetans, but also other nationals like Sherpa and Tamang who had close religious relations with the Tibetans were also admitted. I was the main teacher and Dando Rimpoche was to give dharma teaching occasionally.

Lobsang Phüntso la was to work in the library where we would collect all the scriptures of Tibet so that even if the Chinese would destroy everything in Tibet, we could restore Buddhism like we did in the past from Kham, but we didn't get much support. However, in 1956, when many people came for pilgrimage, the abbot of Loseling, Drelön [Drepung Loseling] Khembo came and stayed with Dando Rimpoche. We requested him to give us all the scriptures of Loseling to be kept in the library because in the future Buddhism will not be good in Tibet. He spat on our faces and said, "Nobody can do anything against the Tibetan politics and the religion. You people are saying inauspicious things. This is very bad." So we were disappointed because he didn't give us the scriptures. Finally, he came as a refugee [in 1959] and was staying in the factory in Bagsar. He was asking us whether there are any scriptures of Loseling. Then I told him, "Do you remember spitting on my face? If you had given us the scriptures of Loseling, now you could get them back. At that time, we couldn't foresee the future, but we knew some political systems of the world." Then he said you are right. This is really disappointing. [laughter]